

London Legal Sector Update



Q1 2026

Our quarterly London Legal Sector Update aims to inform real estate decision makers within law firms of competitor activity and emerging best practice.

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Sector and real estate trends

A round-up of the most disruptive trends shaping law firms and their future real estate requirements.

Three sector trends

Sector consolidation is rising, and firms are turning to real estate to support scale, talent and regional growth.

A REDRAWN MAP REWARDS SCALE OR SPECIALISM

Three major transatlantic combinations dominated the year-end and first quarter, with Winston & Strawn and Taylor Wessing set to go live in May, alongside Hogan Lovells' merger with Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft and Ashurst's combination with Perkins Coie. Smaller-scale consolidation also continues, including Knights Group's talks to acquire Moore Barlow, underscoring growing pressure on firms that fail to scale or differentiate.

PRIVATE EQUITY IS CIRCLING UK LAW FIRMS

Private equity interest in UK law firms remains elevated. A recent [survey](#) found that seven in ten mid-sized firms have been contacted in the past year by a private equity investor or a private equity backed law firm, while 37% of those approached would be open to being acquired under a private equity model. Q1 deal activity included Adeptio Law Group, who acquired Midlands-based Jordans Solicitors and Alcuin Capital Partners who bought Connect2Law Ltd.

TALENT IS DRIVING THE REAL ESTATE AGENDA

A survey of [mid-sized firms](#) suggests property decisions are increasingly people-led, with offices viewed as critical to engaging a multi-generational workforce. While almost half plan no near-term footprint change, of all firms responding to the survey, 21% intend to expand space within a current office, while the same proportion plan to open new offices in different geographies, reflecting ongoing ambitions for regional growth.

Three real estate trends

Strategic relocations, such as Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer's, highlight how brand, ESG and workforce priorities are aligning with a legal demand pipeline dominated by large City-centric requirements.

ALIGNING BRAND, PEOPLE AND PLACE

Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer's planned move reflects the now-familiar relocation drivers in the legal sector: aligning real estate with brand and ESG priorities, and creating a more future-ready, client and employee-facing environment.

The move will also bring London teams together under one roof, reuniting colleagues currently split between the City and Canary Wharf.

CITY CORE LEADS AGAIN

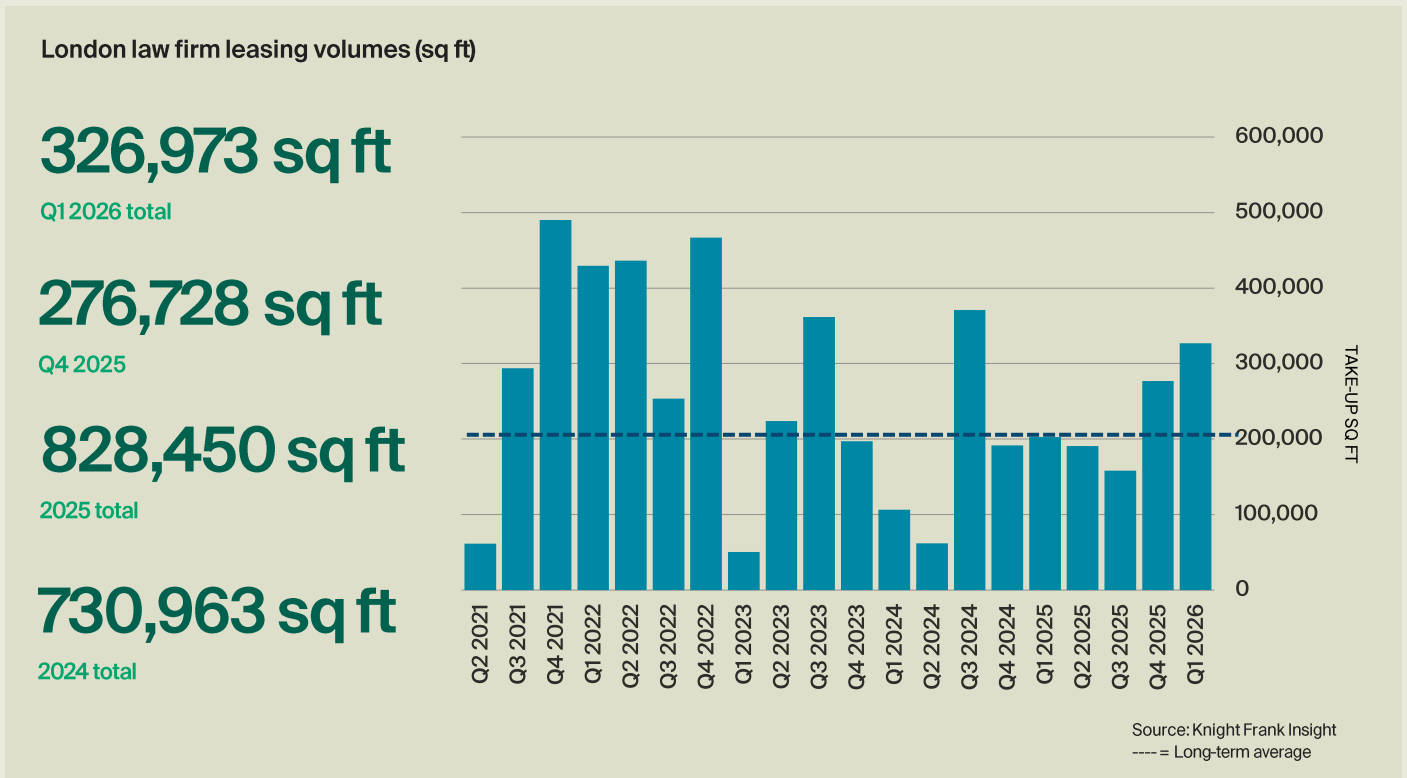
The City Core led both by deal count (5 of 14) and total space taken, with 293,844 sq ft transacted, largely driven by Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer. Midtown activity was stable relative to its five-year quarterly average, although boutique-led demand suppressed average deal sizes, which remained below 5,000 sq ft.

DEMAND BUILDS AROUND BIG MANDATES

By the end of Q1 2026, legal sector demand stood at 1.98m sq ft across 23 requirements, with 322,000 sq ft already under offer. The market is skewed to large mandates, with just under half of active requirements seeking 100,000 sq ft+. Six requirements are expected to regear, and 16 specify the City as at least one of their preferred locations.

Market intelligence

Looking at who is acquiring space, how much and where; the types of buildings law firms are occupying, with particular attention to building accreditations and certifications, and locational preference and clustering.



Law firm leasing transactions – Q1 2026

* = Knight Frank deal – either Landlord or Tenant Representation

Occupier	Grade	Address	HQ Location	Sq Ft	Rent (£ per sq ft)
Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer	New	1 Appold Street, EC2	UK (merger of UK-US firm)	266,054	£103.00 (blended rent)
Hunton Andrews Kurth	Refurbished	The Gherkin, 30 St Mary Axe, EC3	US	12,219	£78.50
Collyer Bristow	Second-hand A	LDN:W, 3 Noble Street, EC2 *	UK	9,810	£80.00
Volterra Fietta	Refurbished	110 High Holborn, WC1	UK	7,200	£45.00
SBP Law	Extensively refurbished	The Smokery, 2-6 Greenhill Rents, EC1	UK	6,560	£62.50

Source: KnightFrank Insight



1.98m sq ft

of active legal sector demand covering 23 requirements, an increase of 19% compared to the previous quarter. Currently, 322,000 sq ft is under offer.

SPECIFICATIONS OF BUILDINGS WHERE LAW FIRMS HAVE TAKEN SPACE



1 Appold Street, EC2

Occupier: Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer

Pre-let

Key features at 1 Appold Street include terraces overlooking Exchange Square's gardens and 48,000 sq ft of leisure space.

The redevelopment will retain 75% of the existing primary structure by weight, with extended floorplates and six new office floors wrapped in a new energy-efficient façade. The scheme includes wellbeing-led features such as end-of-trip facilities, outdoor terraces and increased access to daylight, and sits a short walk from Liverpool Street station.

It is targeting an embodied carbon figure of 477 kgCO₂e/m² (GIA, A1-A5) alongside a circular approach to strip-out, design and procurement.

It is also of note that Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer will have a dedicated entrance, known as 8 Exchange Square.

BREEAM 'Outstanding', NABERS UK 5 Star rating, WELL 'Platinum'



The Gherkin, 30 St Mary Axe, EC3

Occupier: Hunton Andrews Kurth

Refurbished

The building incorporates a diagrid steel structure that supports largely column-free floorplates, alongside a double-skin façade designed to support natural ventilation and reduce reliance on mechanical cooling when conditions allow. Its form and internal lightwells are intended to increase daylight penetration and support air circulation through the office space.

Services and operations include sun-responsive automated blinds, an independent fresh-air supply to each floor, dual power supply, smart building analytics and 100% renewably sourced electricity. Occupier facilities include an onsite concierge, 24/7 management and security, a top-floor restaurant and bar, event space and private dining rooms for hire, and end-of-journey provision including a basement cycle park with ramp access. The Gherkin is approximately a five-minute walk from both Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street mainline stations and is also accessible via Aldgate and Bank underground stations.

EPC 'B', BREEAM 'Excellent', ActiveScore 'Gold', WiredScore 'Platinum'



LDN:W, 3 Noble Street, EC2

Occupier: Collyer Bristow

Second-hand A

Amenities at LDN:W include a shared roof terrace and private terraces, plus a double-height reception with café and lounge space and end-of-trip facilities.

The refurbishment programme focused on reworking and upgrading the existing building, including structural engineering works at roof level and targeted strengthening of upper-level columns only.

Typical floors have access to plenty of natural light, with views over mature trees, London Wall and St Paul's Cathedral.

Moorgate, Barbican, Farringdon, Bank, St Paul's and Mansion House are all located within a 10-minute walk of the building.

EPC 'B', WiredScore 'Platinum', BREEAM 'Excellent', Fitwell 'One Star', WELL Platinum Enabled, Smart Score Platinum'



110 High Holborn, WC1

Occupier: Volterra Fietta

Refurbished

Amenities at 110 High Holborn include ground-floor retail, a basement gym, a roof terrace, and end-of-trip facilities.

The building is defined by its glazed, curtain-walled frontage and a double-height entrance that was enhanced as part of the refurbishment programme.

110 High Holborn sits close to Holborn underground station, with Chancery Lane and Tottenham Court Road also nearby.

EPC 'C'

NEW LAW FIRM LEASES



Latest research



THE LONDON SERIES 2026

We like questions, if you've got one about our research, or would like some property advice, we would love to hear from you.



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